

You can help

The Court hears about 600 cases of dependency, neglect and abuse each year. Therefore, the Court is always looking for volunteers who are Stark County residents and twenty-one (21) years of age or older. You can contact the Court by calling 451-7914.

Requirements

The volunteers are required to complete an application, a screening interview, agree to volunteer for a minimum of one year, attend a series of training workshops, attend further in-service workshops, and to utilize the manual written for the Program. Applicants will be screened and selected on the basis of availability, dedication, reliability, and willingness to learn.

Program Beginnings

The CASA/Guardian ad litem Program began as a result of a need to better represent the rights and interests of abused, neglected and dependent children in Stark County. The Junior League of Canton, Ohio, Inc. in cooperation with Stark County Family Court, established the Volunteer Guardian Ad litem Program in 1982.

Judge Jim D. James, Judge Michael L. Howard, and Judge Rosemarie A. Hall elected as Judges of the Domestic Relations Division of the Court of Common Pleas. The Juvenile Court falls under the jurisdiction of the Domestic Relations Division. This Division of the Court of Common Pleas has been known as the Family Court since 1970.

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Stark County Family Court



Judges

Hon. Jim D. James
Hon. Michael L. Howard
Hon. Rosemarie A. Hall

Court Appointed Special Advocate

A Court Appointed Special Advocate or Guardian ad litem, CASA/GAL, is a person appointed by the Stark County Family Court to represent the best interests of a child during a court proceeding. The purpose of the Volunteer Program is to provide the Court with Guardians who will give the Judge a thoughtful recommendation on what should be planned for the child, based on the Guardian's independent investigation of the facts. The Program's goal is twofold: to provide better representation for the children of Stark County through volunteer participation and to involve more community members and make them aware of the problems facing abused, neglected and dependent children.

Ohio Law

The law requires that a Guardian ad litem be appointed for a child when an agency, such as the Stark County Department of Jobs and Family Services, files a complaint alleging abuse and/or neglect or when a motion for permanent custody is requested. Guardians also may be appointed in dependency cases.

Roles and Responsibilities

A CASA/GAL is an investigator whose job is to seek out all the facts pertinent to the case. Prior to the hearing the Guardian conducts interviews with the parties involved in the case: the child, the caseworker, the parents, the foster parents, possible adoptive parents, school officials, clergy, and gathers other information such as facts from medical and court records.

The CASA/Guardian ad litem is an advocate who will make an independent evaluation after investigation as to what is truly in the child's best interests both in terms of the present situation and also in terms of long term planning. The Guardian will present this recommendation to the Court at a hearing.

The responsibilities of the CASA/Guardian ad litem are:

(A) Investigate the life of the child by interviewing the child, the family, caseworker, involved parties,



Photo by Katarzyna

and seek out all information relevant to the case.

(B) Gather all the facts together, evaluate them, and prepare an objective thoughtful recommendation.

(C) Present this report in oral and written form to the Court at a hearing and advocate for the child's rights and best interests.

Volunteers

A trained volunteer, genuinely interested in the welfare of the child, can give the time to do a thorough investigation of all circumstances in the child's life necessary to arrive at a plan for the child. With this interest and commitment, the Volunteer Guardian ad litem can give each child quality representation and provide a valuable service to the community.

The Program Coordinator assigns cases, monitors the volunteers' activities, conducts training and provides assistance when needed. The training sessions will instruct the volunteers on the role of the Guardian, legal and courtroom procedures, interviewing techniques and social aspects of working with abused, neglected and dependent children.